

## Transcription: James Clements

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*Today is Wednesday, May 16<sup>th</sup>, 2013. My name is James Crabtree and today I'm interviewing Mr. James Clements. This interview is being conducted in support of the Texas General Land Office Veterans Land Board Voices of Veterans Oral History Program. I'm at the General Land Office Building in Austin, and Mr. Clements is at his residence in Austin, Texas, as well. Sir, thank you very much for taking the time to talk to us today. It's an honor for our program.*

**James Clements:** Thank you.

*Sir, the first question that I always like to start off with is please just tell us a little bit about your childhood and your life before you entered the military.*

**James Clements:** Well, it's pretty simple. I was born in Haskell County, Texas, in 1924, August the 20<sup>th</sup>, 1924. My father was a farmer and he and mother were married I think a little better than 50 years and had five children. In '29, he left the farm in 1929, due to he lost it actually. The bank didn't foreclose, he just gave it to 'em. And he was a bridge builder, went into that, and dams, and the carpenter type thing. He worked all his life, and that's where I got into that particular business as well. I have a brother who served in World War II, and I have a brother who served in the Korean War, in the Navy.

*Of the five siblings, where were you in the order?*

**James Clements:** In the middle.

*Yes sir. And do you remember where you were when World War II started?*

**James Clements:** We were in Corpus Christi, Texas, when daddy, my father, was working on the naval air station down there. They were just about to complete that thing I think, and we had been down there about a year. I remember this well. He had gone to see my grandfather on the other side of Abilene, a little community there, and got the news on the radio of course, and he had a new Chevrolet car and it got too hot coming back, so he really was frightened because my oldest brother was at Pearl Harbor.

*Oh he was. So tell us sir about that and when you got any word from him if you did.*

**James Clements:** Well, it was strange. Of course radio was pretty simple. You didn't see anybody and you took for granted everything was true. Our first reports on the damage there was terrible, and it was, there's no question. I saw part of it later on in my life, not the bombing or anything, but the havoc that was created by the bombs. My brother was on the USS New Orleans which was a heavy cruiser, and they were there, and his ship, "praise the Lord and pass the ammunition," I think the chaplain of his ship was the one that said that, and he came through it fine and the ship was not hit.

*How long did it take before your family got word though that he was OK?*

**James Clements:** Well I think we probably had a day and a half, something like that, two days. And as promptest we could. I don't know, I don't recall just how it was. I was in high school and don't remember all of that of course.

*It's probably safe to assume he might've sent a telegram or something of that sort.*

**James Clements:** He did, yes.

*What was it that made him go into the Navy before the war?*

**James Clements:** Well, he had tried several different things to make a living. He was I think 18 or 19 years old when he went in, and it just seemed like the service was something that he wanted to be in. He had been in about two or three years when the war started. I don't recall just exactly when he went in.

*So when the war started, obviously your family was worried about your brother. Did you think that there was a chance at some point that you would be going into the war, too?*

**James Clements:** I don't think there was any doubt that I would be going, just a matter of when.

*And then at that point because you were still in high school, did you expect to get drafted or did you want to go ahead and pick your service?*

**James Clements:** I expected to be drafted.

*And you were fine with going in whatever branch you were assigned or did you want to enlist?*

**James Clements:** Well, we had a little discussion about that in San Antonio, that's where I went, the draft board sent me down there with 150 other people. When I went through the line physical and all of that with all these people, the Marines were standing pretty close by with their man who was selecting people, and he took my papers and went through 'em and marked on them – this man would be good material to be selected. I looked at that and I didn't want any part of the Marines. So we went on through and I got to the man handling the Navy part of it and I said look here, I don't want this. I come from a family with sailors in it, and I want to go to the Navy. I knew I was physically able, there wasn't any doubt in my mind about that. He said well we can take care of that, and he did. He was able to get my name removed from that Marine Corps, but it was an experience, it really was.

*Why was it you didn't want to go in the Marine Corps?*

**James Clements:** I had some friends that lost their lives rather rapidly. I did not want the infantry in the Army either.

*You wanted to stay in the Navy.*

**James Clements:** I wanted to stay in the Navy. This was my 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, August the 20<sup>th</sup>, 1943. They gave me a 7-day delay in orders. I came back to Austin and got my business organized, what little business I had.

*And then did they send you out to San Diego?*

**James Clements:** Out to San Diego. The strangest thing, too, they lined us up in alphabetical order and about halfway down, they were taking sailors for boot camp at Corpus Christi, and I was hoping I'd get to go down there because I'd lived down there and got to high school. No, they took you from A to something, and that something sent us on out to San Diego.

*What are your memories, sir, of basic training?*

**James Clements:** Well, the main problem that I had, profanity is just something that's not in my family, let's just say that. And it just seemed to me like that I was directed at with all of this stuff that they were throwing out, and I finally talked to the Chief Petty Officer and I had to pull some extra duty because of my activity in objecting to a bunch of this stuff, but anyway, I talked to the Chief and he said well, I want you to know one thing. It's not directed at you. And I said well you can't prove that by what I see and what I hear. Anyway, he said well, a little later on in this you will learn what this is all about. He said my advice to you for the next three weeks, that's how long it would be before we got out, is to obey every order and take it like it was directed to a mule or horse or whatever. Anyway, I said \_\_\_\_\_. And I told the First Class that was in charge of us, I'm with you, let's go. And so I didn't have any more trouble with it, and later on, I did find out the necessity of following orders.

*Sure, and obviously, too, the Navy is pretty famous for their profanity I think. So you hear people say they swear like a sailor.*

**James Clements:** Exactly right. I'm thankful I came out of that without that, without tattoos and without the profanity.

*I think you're right. It's possible to do it, but there's a lot that succumb to it.*

**James Clements:** You bet.

*So during your training, besides profanity, what were kind of the biggest things that they were doing? I guess they were teaching you how to swim and put out fires on ships and that sort of thing?*

**James Clements:** Number one, physical training, it was a lot of it. I had surgery just before I was drafted for a hernia and it had not completely healed up, and they went ahead and took me anyway. My dad says you can't have him. He said just think we can't. This is one of the reasons. But anyway I was exempt from a certain amount of the physical training for the period of time. I think the stress test and all of this that we went through, or they went through, I missed that. The physical drill with arms and all the rest of it, it was, we had automatic weapons, we had rifles. I qualified as an expert marksman, which if I ever went on shore that'd be \$4 a month. Anyway, and we did some running uphill and downhill, marching, and the Navy men of course would play every once in a while. We'd have dress drills in full uniform and all of this.

*Where did you do the rifle range? Did you go up north for that?*

**James Clements:** No, they had the rifle range right there in San Diego. People on that range, I was familiar with guns. I don't say I was raised with 'em, but on our farm and everything we had 'em. But there was people that didn't have any idea what a gun was, and the pointing. I guess more nervous than anything else.

*That's probably right. So when you graduated from boot camp, did you know where you were going and what you would be doing?*

**James Clements:** Yes, my orders, we filled out a sheet of what we thought we could do best, and I had had some machine shop training, well it was an elective in high school, and I put that down, and they selected me to go to a little machinist school I guess they called it, in Wapata, North Dakota.

*That's an out of the way place to send you, wasn't it?*

**James Clements:** Well, I went in in August, and I had six weeks, and I knew, the orders were posted and I knew where I was going, and I asked the Chief Petty Officer, I said do you think I ought to get \_\_\_\_\_. San Diego was hot. He said what are you talking about? I said look where I'm going. I'm going to North Dakota. I said I think it's cool up there. He said no, it's cold up there. So anyway we got up there, and it was 120 of us in the class that I was in. There was four classes. And I had 16 weeks of training. Well, drafting, just a little bit of everything.

*How big was that base?*

**James Clements:** There was 500 sailors in there. It was a college. It was North Dakota State School of Science.

*That makes sense.*

**James Clements:** We had of course civilians run the cafeteria and everything. It was a good time, it really was. I guess we had been there about two or three weeks and it started snowing, and that particular one was I guess the worst that had been there in some time. It was 40 below and they would break you out every morning about 5 o'clock and shovel snow off the sidewalk. At first, we was running outdoor track, and this is early in the morning. We'd run that track for about an hour and then we'd go eat and then get ready for class. I was one of the unfortunate few – we had one man that died on the track, had a heart attack. But I got a little bit of strep throat and it looked like I was going to die. The commander called my folks in Austin and told them I was pretty sick.

*That's not good.*

**James Clements:** And mother and dad wanted to know if they could come up there. Of course the military aircraft was about the only thing you could get on then. They told them wasn't no reason because they were doing the best they could do. I was able to overcome it, and I'm thankful for that.

*Sure, absolutely. So when you graduated from there, I guess you felt like you had a pretty good training?*

**James Clements:** Well yeah, I think that I was ready mentally to take on whatever activity the Navy put me into. I got a 10-day delay en route from North Dakota to Bremerton, Washington, and that 10 days I came home. That was I think a day and a half or two days, and when I got home, I hadn't been home oh, but just a couple of hours, my mother got a phone call from a Mrs. Kroser that was my mother, one of my best friends, and Robert Kroser had been killed in

Louisiana on maneuvers. A half track had turned over with him in it, and we buried him in a couple of days and it was time for me to get on the train.

*Wow, that's too bad.*

**James Clements:** And we went, the train took us back to Minneapolis, Minnesota, took me back to Minneapolis across the great northern route. I don't know where, but in the winter time it's beautiful. The train got me to Webberton, well to Seattle, and then we had to go across Puget Sound to the naval base.

*And then were you assigned to a ship at that point?*

**James Clements:** No, I was, what did they call that thing, it's shipping something, that we were waiting for a ship.

*OK, so you were waiting. How long did you have to wait until you got a vessel?*

**James Clements:** I think I had about three weeks. It seemed to me like the end of March or the first week in April, I caught a destroyer, which I don't know whether you know anything about ships or not.

*A little bit, yes sir.*

**James Clements:** It's rather small, and it was one of the newer, the Fletcher type.

*What was the name of your ship, sir?*

**James Clements:** The USS Capps. DD-550.

*How do you spell that?*

**James Clements:** C-A-P-P-S.

*Yes sir. It's kind of ironic, too, that I know you mentioned that you wanted to avoid the Marine Corps because a lot of Marines had been killed, but I know, being on destroyers, there were quite a few sailors that lost their lives.*

**James Clements:** Well, this, a terrible bunch, I will tell you this. I was fortunate that the action in the Marshall Islands and the Gilbert Islands, it was over. And we just went in to further training and transport. We were convoyed ships everywhere in that part of the Pacific.

*I think a lot of people don't realize the severe fighting that the Navy was involved in, like especially at Guadalcanal. I'm a Marine myself, and everybody talks about the Marines at Guadalcanal, but the Navy casualties were three or four times greater than anything the Marines had, and there were so many sailors that were lost in those fights with the Japanese.*

**James Clements:** The kamikaze's, the Japanese realized about the time that we got into that part of the world, the Marshalls and the Gilberts, and there was a little island down there, Peleliu, that back office said that he needed real bad, and I guess he did, but he said in three days it'd be over with.

*Yeah, it was a lot longer than that.*

**James Clements:** Yes sir.

*So your ship went to Peleliu?*

**James Clements:** Oh we escorted some of the ships in there. That's about all we did until I'd guess the Marianas I think was from the first major thing that we got involved with, and it was still in escort of troops and ships, to bring supplies to the Marines and the Army, and of course we had little thing on the way, we had the Marianas turkey shoot. It was a pretty good, well it proved to the Japanese that we were no longer afraid of them, we were no longer weaker than they were, and I can recall vividly picking pilots up that couldn't make it back to the carrier, out of gas.

*I'm sure those pilots were glad to see you all.*

**James Clements:** We had one, we drug him a little bit, couldn't help it, but he said a few choice words, but he was glad to see us.

*What was it like aboard the ship? Do you remember much about your ship's Captain and other sailors?*

**James Clements:** Well, the destroyer, we didn't really have a whole lot of fan fire about what we were doing. We got to do pretty well what we wanted to do if we stayed in line, and there wasn't any saluting and all of this.

*Oh sure, that's all for shore duty.*

**James Clements:** But anyway, it was, I was assigned to a boiler room. My rating when I came out was a Water Tender 2<sup>nd</sup> Class, and I went aboard ship as a 1<sup>st</sup> Class Fireman, and in about I guess three months I had got to be a 3<sup>rd</sup> Class Petty Officer and then finished up as a 2<sup>nd</sup> Class Petty Officer. But the fire room was of course plenty hot. We had two boilers. We were in the forward fire room with two boilers forward and two aft, and there were two engine rooms. We had I guess kind of a run of the engineering department. As long as we kept our boiler room clean on watch for the next one, we didn't have to turn to. Do you know what that word is?

*Sure.*

**James Clements:** OK, we didn't have to do any of that. While the Chief said we had saw to it when we left at the end of the watch, we had three four-hour watches, and -

*Wow, so you weren't doing a 12 on, 12 off then.*

**James Clements:** No, I did 72 on and 8 off one time, and it liked to eat me up.

*I'll bet. But normally you were doing three to four-hour shifts?*

**James Clements:** Yeah, we were doing, we dog-watched. You'd be 4 to 8, and then 8 to 12, and then a 12 to 4. And you'd have one of that watch for two weeks, something like that, and then it would be time to move us all around. It let us get a little rest.

*That's great. How was food aboard the ship?*

**James Clements:** Well it was Navy chow. To me it just was terrible. We had a commissary steward that got a medical discharge for malnutrition, if you can believe that.

*That is hard to believe.*

**James Clements:** But anyway we had a Pilipino cook come aboard, and we'd fish a little bit off the fan tail of the ship occasionally and catch a fish and go trade that to Cisco, that was what we called him, I don't know what his name was, but we could get a steak for that fish head and rice that he was gonna have. But we made it fine. There was one time later on towards the end of the war that, the destroyer normally carried enough food and supplies to run about six weeks at sea, had to have oil in between all that. We'd have to have oil sometimes every other day. But this, it just seemed like, well it was Navy beans and it was a little bit of everything, the best they could do, and I guess the biggest aggravation that I had, it wasn't with the food or the cooks, we had 300 cases of beer in the hole and that was for shore parties, supposedly.

*OK, so you never got to drink any?*

**James Clements:** Well I don't drink, and I didn't then. I did sell what little bit I got for \$5 a bottle, but no, I couldn't see – well the crew going hungry and all that beer stored in the hole. Anyway it happened and that's that.

*Were you able to get much mail from back home?*

**James Clements:** Well, it took a long time. I might get four or five letters at a time. Mother, and I married a young lady that I was dating before I went in, that we'd been married I believe it's 67 or 68 years.

*Oh that's great. So you were married before you shipped out then.*

**James Clements:** No, I got married July the 16<sup>th</sup>, and the war was over August the 14<sup>th</sup>. I was home on leave.

*OK, yes sir. But you were writing to her before you got married.*

**James Clements:** Yes sir. And my mother, and occasionally my daddy. Of course I can recall him sitting by the radio before I ever went in for the news when he got in from work, and he'd be there until way into the night listening for what was happening in the Pacific more than anything else because that's where my brother was. Where I was, I know he was doing the same thing.

*Did your brother serve on the New Orleans the entire time?*

**James Clements:** No, the New Orleans in the Uward Guadalcanal, I'm trying to think of the straits, Bongo Straits, well they took the New Orleans up through there. Of course you know what they were fighting battleships with cruisers and destroyers, and the New Orleans got the

bow blew off of it, and they patched it back together and sent it to Australia, towed it to Australia I think, and they repaired it enough so it went to Bremerton and they rebuilt it and sent it back to sea. He got off of it when it came into port from Australia.

*Did they put him on another ship?*

**James Clements:** Oh yeah, he served on the, I believe a troop transport and I can't think of the name of it, and he was responsible, he says feeding 5,000 troops. I can't see how they'd get 5,000 troops on one of those ships.

*Well, it was a lot though from everything I've ever read and heard, they definitely put a lot of troops on those things.*

**James Clements:** Well they did. He was in the Atlantic at that time.

*Yeah, that's very possible. I know I've heard a lot of accounts of veterans saying that it would take them about a week to go from the Atlantic to Europe, and there were so many on board that pretty much all it seemed like they were doing if they weren't sleeping, is they were standing in line waiting to eat.*

**James Clements:** I have a brother-in-law who was in the European Theater and he went to Germany. He said that the ship he was on, he didn't think they would ever get there, and you couldn't shower or you couldn't do anything but stand.

*Yeah, that would be pretty miserable.*

**James Clements:** It would be for me.

*So I imagine then with you and your brother both being at war, on ships, that your parents probably very closely followed the news then.*

**James Clements:** Everything that they could hear, everything that they could read. Before I ever went in, we had two daily newspapers here at that time, the *Austin Daily Tribune* and then the *Austin American Statesman*, but one of them would put out an extra edition if there was anything real exciting. Well, it didn't have to be exciting, they just made it that way, and of course my dad had to have a paper right then when they, they'd come by the house selling those things, walking, and of course he had to have a paper where he could find out where his son was. And mother says the same thing with me.

*Along the same lines sir, did you have much idea of the news aboard ship as to what was going on in the rest of the war?*

**James Clements:** Well we got it on radio and yeah, we were pretty well – now the Pacific part of it, yes, it was up to date because our radio contacts was great out there. The invasion over there of Normandy and starting right there, they kept us up to date pretty quickly. North Africa, we didn't get much out of it.

*Did you have a pretty good feel though for that things were going the right way, that you were pushing the Japanese back, and that the war was going to be won?*



**James Clements:** Well I'll tell you where I felt that the war was going to be won. I mentioned a while ago the Marianas turkey shoot. We did a number on the Japanese Navy there. I mean it was something that they never overcame.

*Yeah, that's why they call it the turkey shoot.*

**James Clements:** And I believe Admiral Mitscher was in charge of that thing. This to me it's always been a strange thing. As far as I knew, we had two fleets out there. We had the 7<sup>th</sup> fleet which was MacArthur's ground troop support, and then we had the carriers which when Admiral Halsey was on the Jersey, that was his flag ship. Then it was the 3<sup>rd</sup> fleet, and when Mitscher was on his carrier, and I don't remember which one it was, it was the 5<sup>th</sup> fleet, and the only time we ever had a maul out there at one time was right at the end of the war. They began to kind of mix them all up and everything, but that particular battle there with the Japanese, it brought them – they would not surrender and the severe casualties that the Navy took started right there. I mean the kamikaze's were thick.

*Yeah, I think that was the desperate time for the Japanese and they started resorting to a lot of the kamikaze attacks.*

**James Clements:** You bet. They knew it was over. The admirals knew it was over and their generals knew it was over. They missed their boat at Guadalcanal.

*So during general quarters, I guess your station then was down in the boiler room?*

**James Clements:** Boiler room, yes.

*And you couldn't really I guess tell what was going on, but I'm sure you could hear it.*

**James Clements:** Well yes, and we had privileges, and it all depended on just exactly what we were into. We could go topside and take a look at it.

*Did your ship ever escort any carriers?*

**James Clements:** Oh yes. From the Marianas, we went to Iwo Jima, and we were shore bombardment there. That's the old battleships were lined up and we had two or three days before the invasion of very active stuff.

*Just a lot of shelling.*

**James Clements:** A lot of shelling. The big guns, the battleships, they set offshore, and close to the shore was the destroyer screen, and then there would be a cruiser group and then there would be the battleships, but you could hear those big shells coming over.

*Oh I imagine. That had to have been pretty impressive. I don't think there would be anything else like it.*

**James Clements:** At Iwo Jima, we took the underwater demolition group in. That's our Seals today. My ship, we took 'em in and I think it was two days, something like that, before D-Day, and I watched that operation and we weren't in general quarters all the time, and I was impressed with those people. I can understand how their Special Forces fit.

*Yeah, that was kind of the evolution or the beginning of a lot of that. Was your ship within range of Iwo Jima when the flag went up at Mt. Suribachi?*

**James Clements:** Oh yeah, I'm glad you asked that. They announced it on the ship radio, they are raising the flag on Mt. Suribachi, and we were probably maybe 5,000 yards off the beach. Of course my Chief, he let three at a time or four at a time go up and while all that was going, and we could see it with binoculars.

*Wow, that's awesome.*

**James Clements:** We had the only real problem, I don't say it was a problem on D-Day, we were setting off the beach of course doing whatever the spotters told us to do, but there was an LCI rocket ship that was hit by one of the shore batteries from the Japanese, and had I believe it was 89 wounded man on it, and every man on it was wounded. Our Captain turned us in between them and the shore and we took the 89 men off. I really didn't have a whole lot of respect for our doctor until that particular time. He and three Corps men, they didn't lose a man. We transported them the next day to the battleship Texas. They had a hospital on it. But it was about the closest thing – we had been close enough, the ship was close enough with binoculars that you could see. Now this is kind of hard to say, but stacking Marine dead up like cord wood.

*Yeah, I imagine that's right.*

**James Clements:** I'm sure you've seen some of it. It hurt.

*Yeah, I know it's definitely a famous battle and very bloody battle.*

**James Clements:** It was, no question. We were there 35 days, and we were with the shore bombardment group. We'd set out the ship's nickname or whatever they wanted to call it was Spit Wad, and during the night, they'd say Spit Wad, load a star, and we'd load a star shell and they would fire, shoot a star. It just went on and on and on. The Japanese of course had built tunnels throughout.

*That's right, they were completely dug in.*

**James Clements:** The casualties were great, no question about it.

*I know, sir, in the movie Flag of Our Fathers, they portray that scene where the flag is raised atop Suribachi, and you can hear all the horns on the ships celebrating.*

**James Clements:** Oh yeah.

*Do you remember the horns going off?*

**James Clements:** Oh yeah. Everything, that was a defeat, I guess the one we were looking for, I don't know.

*That's got to be something to have been able to see that.*

**James Clements:** I don't know, it just seemed like the war at that time, it picked up in intensity. There wasn't any question about it. And as I mentioned a while ago, the Marianas turkey shoot, we knew we were going to win.

*And then after Iwo Jima was done, where did the Capps go to at that point?*

**James Clements:** OK, 7-day, we put in the Ulippe, that was our ship anchorage, and put in there and for 7 days we took on stores, ammo, and oil, and 7 days later we moved out with the carriers towards Okinawa. We spent 85 days at Okinawa with the carriers.

*Are there any particular moments of the whole, because obviously you were aboard the ship for a long time and a lot of different engagements, are there any particular moments that stand out more than others, or anything I'm not asking?*

**James Clements:** Well, the thing that I think probably hurt me more than anything else, we had one casualty aboard ship, and he fell from the bridge during the night, and it killed him. But the burial at sea did. I don't know, it hurt, it really did, not because he was not only my friend, ship mate, but the body tied up in canvas with 55-pound projectile from a 5-inch gun and it's weighted down. But I guess that and knowing whether I had seen that Iwo Jima with field glasses and the casualties there, it made an impression on me, I'll say that.

*Yes sir. Where was your ship when the war ended, do you remember?*

**James Clements:** Oh yes. We were in San Pedro Naval Station for a general overhaul.

*OK, so back in California.*

**James Clements:** Back in California.

*Do you remember that day? Do you remember how you learned about it?*

**James Clements:** Yeah, it seemed to me like it was, I had the duty, and we were in dry dock, and I had the duty, and when they announced that the war was over, I got leave, I got liberty, and went to my wife was out there, she'd come out to California, and I caught a bus and went to the little naval housing thing there. Thousands of people, I mean they were everywhere, shouting, drinking. My wife was of course I was happy it was over, but as we really, as I guess the best thing when I really realized that it was all over, I don't know, I could not help but feel for those people that we left over there, the ones that were dead, and their families and everything. It made an impression on me. We spent the dry dock there. We had 40 days leave. I had 20, and the first leave, and then the other people, the other leave people went 20, and we were scheduled to go back into, and lead the destroyer squadron. We had what they called the Commodore aboard. He was the destroyer commander. He had nine ships, nine destroyers, and he could send them anywhere he wanted to or whatever, and they were his. We were due to lead, it was Destroyer Squadron 57 I believe, at the end of Tokyo harbor before the war was over. That was part of the plan for the invasion of Japan. I never got over to that. We never got back to the battlefield.

*You had to have felt fortunate not to have had to make that invasion.*

**James Clements:** It was a happy day, the end of the war.

*At that point did you have enough points to get out of the Navy?*

**James Clements:** No, we moved the destroyer down to San Diego to decommission, and I got my discharge December the 10<sup>th</sup>, 1945.

*Were you glad to get out? Were you ready to come back to Texas?*

**James Clements:** Well, that's another story. The Captain came down into the boiler room and I was in charge of the watch and the repair work and everything that was going on, and he said I know what you're going to tell me, but I've got to ask you anyway, and that kind of bothered me a little bit. I said well, what's bothering you? He said well, I know you're a family man and all of this, and he said I'm ready to offer you Chief Petty Officer's rating. I was 2<sup>nd</sup> Class, that'd be jumping to 1<sup>st</sup> Class – if you'd just ship over. And I said well you got it right, Captain. I don't want to ship over. I want out. It's not that I appreciate everything the Navy has done for me, and my country, but I want to go home, no question about it.

*Well I guess he obviously thought a lot of you and that's why he would ask you that, but that makes complete sense that you were ready to get back.*

**James Clements:** Well, I was discharged at Camp Wallace, Texas. I don't know whether you know where that's at.

*No, I don't. Where is Camp Wallace?*

**James Clements:** Let me see, Falacias. I took my physical and everything and they were ready to discharge me, and they said you've got a hearing loss, and I knew that I did because it had happened early on in my sea duty. He said if you will hang around here a couple of three days, we'll get you a pension. I said well, what kind of pension are you talking about? He said well, \$12 a month. And I told him I had a job waiting for me and I believe I'd just come on home. And I got the disability. They sent it right here, and I got the disability oh, two years ago, three years ago.

*Yes sir, it took a while.*

**James Clements:** Well, I didn't have any problem with it, except bookkeeping kind of, I don't know whether you're familiar with discharge papers or not, but there is two numbers, at that time it was anyway, but the Navy, I was not in the regular Navy, I was in the Reserves, and when I got my discharge they placed me in the regular Navy, and nobody could find me on the computer. But it ended up that they finally did. Everything as far as I'm concerned has been real fine. I don't have any problem. I know some of our veterans are in terrible shape, not only that war, but other wars that we're into, the present, and it's a shame.

*Sure. So when the war ended, sir, did you come back to Austin?*

**James Clements:** I came back to Austin to my bride and we had a boy in May, we had a girl in four years, and I went to work, I was going to go to the university. I wanted to be an engineer, and when I got back, of course we had the Bill of Rights and all this.

*Yeah, the GI Bill, yes sir.*

**James Clements:** But it wasn't time. It was between semesters and all this kind of thing, and I didn't have time to fill all of it out, and my dad said if you want to go to work, said you can go to work for me. He was working for a local contractor here. They work union help. Anyway, well I said I believe I will. I had to make a living so I could get ready. I got into the union and I don't know, I had a couple of thoughts about going back to school and all this, but he asked, daddy asked me about time I got ready for the summer, and I'd been there and saved a little money, and I told him, I said I'm not going to go back. And I had a 50-year little affair with the construction business. It done real well.

*Especially in Austin, I'm sure you saw a lot of construction over the years.*

**James Clements:** Well yeah, I was a major part of the whole of it. I've got buildings that I guess my title was construction superintendent. Well I don't think it's that way anymore, but at the time I started, my first job was superintendent, I was it. There wasn't nobody there to help me. And you had a timekeeper to keep the time, but to put the pieces together, that's what I did. I made a real good living doing it. I did four of the local high schools.

*That's great. Oh really, which ones?*

**James Clements:** Well it started, I worked as an engineer on McCallum and Reagan, and Anderson out to the west here.

*On Mesa?*

**James Clements:** Yeah, and then the one over, LBJ.

*Over in east Austin. I graduated from McCallum High School, so that's why I was curious.*

**James Clements:** It don't look like it did when we built it.

*Yeah, I know they've changed a little bit here and there.*

**James Clements:** A whole bunch.

*I know when I read when that was built, that was really kind of considered far north Austin, and that was I guess the second or third high school in Austin.*

**James Clements:** Oh yeah, it was, we had a contract to do two, Travis and McCallum. At the same time, we built 'em at the same time. That was the first.

*Yeah, besides Austin High. That's pretty wild. So I guess you had children then?*

**James Clements:** I have a boy and a girl.

*Did they ever talk to you much about your time in the Navy?*

**James Clements:** Well, my son spent some time in the Navy and every once in a while it'll come up, but of course we're into another generation now that knew very little about what it was all about at that time. I know one thing, they are very proud of their father, no problems with

that, and my wife is proud of her husband. I don't know that I'd want to go again. But if they called today, yeah, we'd go.

*Sure, I don't think anyone would ever want to go to war again or be in the situations that you were in, gone from home and out in the middle of the ocean and that sort of thing.*

**James Clements:** Well the last part of the war in the Pacific, we spent 87 days at Okinawa on the line with carriers, and it was 24-hour day kamikaze. They wanted the little ship, they picked the destroyers. I don't know how many destroyers we lost up there, but the heavy casualty list that the Navy suffered, well it was at Okinawa. There are plenty of them down the line, I don't mean that, but when our Navy was fighting like I said a while ago, battleships with cruisers and destroyers, there's something wrong somewhere. Somebody missed a beat.

*Yeah, it was definitely a lot of fierce Naval battles in the Pacific, and a lot of almost head to head battles with the Japanese early on.*

**James Clements:** It was I don't know just actually, surface to surface battles.

*That's right, and sometimes very close proximity to the point that it was almost leveling the guns at each other in some cases.*

**James Clements:** Well this is what I understand in a lot of cases they'd just wrangle down as low as you can go and fire 'em.

*And then the night battles were especially difficult because it was hard to tell exactly who you were firing upon and friendly fire was a concern.*

**James Clements:** Well my understanding of the night time, the Japanese were better trained for that than we were. Somehow I don't know where we just slipped up. I know our radar was not all that good.

*Yeah early on especially, yes sir.*

**James Clements:** It wasn't a major help to us. But anyway.

*Just like at the Battle of Guadalcanal, a Naval battle, there were a couple of Admirals that were killed, which is pretty amazing, and they both received a medal of honor. So they were on the bridge of their ship. So it gives you an idea when Admirals are getting killed, how really horrible that fighting was.*

**James Clements:** Well there is, there's a book that's been published and I can't think of the name of it that I read here a while back that it took the beginning of the war from the invasion of Guadalcanal up through those battles that they had, and it was brutal.

*Yeah, it might be Neptune's Inferno?*

**James Clements:** Yep, that's right.

*Yeah, that's Jim Hornfisher who's an Austin author, and I read that book, too, and I learned a lot because I don't think a lot of people really know the Navy history of some of those battles, especially Guadalcanal, a lot of casualties.*

**James Clements:** Well like I said when we started this, the bottom of those straits, I don't know where that is, I don't have the slightest notion, but they would send four of our ships, the big ships, the cruisers up, and I believe we had one battleship in the mixture, and the destroyers and PT boats, and a question that has come to my mind that the Japanese at that time, their torpedoes were much better than ours.

*I've heard that, too, yes sir, I've read that.*

**James Clements:** And a little hectic. I know this much, our ship, our Captain was a submarine commander at one time, but he didn't want to fight a submarine. He said that's bad business. Drop your charges and go.

*Yeah, he probably knew what he was talking about.*

**James Clements:** He did.

*Yes sir. Well sir, I've really enjoyed being able to do this interview today with you and –*

**James Clements:** Well I appreciate the call and I hope I haven't bored you.

*Oh no, not at all, and this is, it's an honor for our program to be able to interview you and on behalf of Commissioner Patterson and everyone here at the Land Office, we want to thank you for your service to our nation. Hopefully the CD's and certificate and letter we send are just a very small token of that appreciation.*

**James Clements:** There's one other book that I would tell you if you can get your hands on, *The Sacrificial Lambs*. It was written by a man on the Destroyer Rin, well it's a diary of from would say the Philippines up, and I had it, and well I don't know, it's in somebody else's hands right now.

*I'll look for it. I like to read a lot.*

**James Clements:** But it's more about the destroyer part of it than anything else, and it's amazing.

*I'll definitely try to look for that.*

**James Clements:** All right.

*Well sir, I really again, I appreciate it and like I said before we started the call, in a couple of weeks or so be looking for that package from us.*

**James Clements:** All right, I'll do that.

*All right sir, thanks again.*

*[End of recording]*